

On

Aboutness

narratives &
the independent observer

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Three essays

Impossibility experienced

How could it be possible to take at once the position of actor and the perspective of observer by this introducing a separation in turn introducing an experience of distance, even more of aboutness?

That is the conundrum at stake in this contribution.

After exploring structural characteristics of that position the attention goes to unveiling a historical meaning giving it a particular twist. Suggestions about the emergence of this curious stance provide the core. A last comment on a condition of alienation assumed to be following from all this rounds up.

On aboutness and declaration

This contribution offers a comment on an article of Thomas Wynn in *Adaptive Behaviour* (2021) in which the author refers to non-linguistic systems of declarative knowledge. It clarifies in what condition declaration finds place and what the relation to aboutness is.

Archimedes and the palace of mirrors

This also refers to the observer on the sideline more precisely on the performed act of reporting i.e. bringing forth narratives. The attention is directed on how the hominin evolved into a storytelling species as a particular instrument supporting negotiation of the changing environment. It further deals with the critical remark that if all is narrative then this contribution is too hence why should it have more merit than any other version (science versus religion for instance)? In order to provide an answer on this the model proposing the existence of higher order thoughts is getting commented on. Further the reasons to choose for operationalism are defended therewith justifying the methodological perspective taken.

The independent observer, an experienced impossibility

Setting the frame

There are two insights which I consider decisive because they come as irrefutable unless mysterious interventions would become introduced and accepted.

Darwin inspired the first one. The sketch of the tree of descent suggests a common ground for all species. It becomes particularly important for species most akin, for the actual subject all branches belonging to the family of great apes. This shared condition is not restricted to the domain of physiology. Darwin in the Descent of Man already observed “the mental intuitions must have been the same”. This perspective helps in the sense that looking for explanations the common lies open in plain view.

Kant provides the second insight. The way the world is getting perceived is organized by the structure of the mind. Indeed the body is the selective and constructive at the same time confining filter rendering the world as a phenomenon.

Joined, the human perception of the world is in a definite way determined by being an embodied animal, a condition shared with all other species. This does not only come as the most plausible depiction of the fundamental human condition; it is a mystery how it could be refuted.¹

The condition adduced allows one conclusion: the world perceived cannot be else but a construct brought forth by the organism. Be it an earthworm or a human, the environment experienced is an embodied construct. What is seen is in line with the character and the abilities proper to the body.

In short it is impossible to imagine how this condition could be transcended, left behind.

Imagine a pile of bricks allowing building dwellings of all kinds, from very large to a tiny house, an endless variation of forms and organizations. But despite this plethora of possibilities it fundamentally will remain a construction of bricks. Something similar is the case in respect to embodied organisms. Whatever the realizations brought forth, such as the apparent magic trick to think verbally, the determination and confinement following from the embodiment is definite and closing.

On the other hand any linguistic formulation suggests tacitly the taking of a position, a vantage point detached from the centre of embodied action. Take the declaration “I am in love”. It is considered a personal expression straight from the heart.

But on closer inspection, focussing on the structure of the sentence, it shows an observation.

An observation of some event is getting reported, in particular that someone referred to as “I” is in love.

The problem

Taking into account the previous paragraph about being enabled at the same time confined by embodiment, the question arises how the reporting instance being the centre of action could unfold a perspective from a position somewhere outside of the centre of action?

¹ At the end of this contribution a note is added about the corresponding interest in the different approaches.

That is the conundrum needing to be solved.

This has been discussed earlier in “The Forgotten Transition” but in that case from the point of view of a stage in the anthropogenic development. The following approach will take a different perspective.

Structural characteristics the observational position

The position of an observer outside the field of action has a few characteristics.

In first instance the reporter seems not to collapse with the actor. Both experience a different position by this introducing, better still ‘installing’ in the experience a *space* divorced from the centre of action.

Secondly the observer-reporter is taking position in that space consequently outside the centre of action.

Thirdly not collapsing the one with the other, a suggestion of distance rises strikingly by Sartre coined “Cette distance nulle”. It expresses an experience of distance but not a factual occurrence. In fourth instance the relation between observer and actor has a particular structure: the observer-reporter reflects on the condition of the actor. It comes as considered from a bird’s eye – some call it a God’s eye perspective, others Archimedes’ position hence the title.

Cutting corners, all of the characteristics such as non-identity, the position outside, distance, the stance of consideration and the report or declaration are captured by one single concept: aboutness.

These are all structural features, as soon as language is the medium of expression always occurring.

There is also a semantic feature: the idea of objectivity i.e. being free of subjective payloads.

The historical meaning

Apart from the characteristics embedded in the genetic formation there is also a historical influenced meaningful dimension.

Objectivity has not always been understood as the sense we are familiar with.² In the early days before there was even mentioning of objectivity a “scientific” narration was meant to depict nature as truthful as possible.³ In the 14th century what was called ‘object’ referred to what appeared in front of the senses, a qualification which today would be considered subjective. Subject on the other hand referred to the essence of that what is, what exists. This approach was still accepted in the period Descartes composed the “Meditationes”. Also important is the fact that these qualifications were not much in use, not with the importance characterizing the actual appreciation. The writings of Kant in the 18th century signified a turning point. Object(ive) so he meant, was the form determined by the schemes of the mind such as time, space and causality. Subject(ive) referred to the sensations accompanying perception.

Midst the 19th century the human factor became considered a weakness in the endeavour of realising knowledge. Moods and caprices had to be suppressed, better still replaced by mechanical means in which human interference was absent such as in photography. Daston and Galistel call this stage mechanical objectivity.

This brief illustration wants to draw the attention on a semantic fluctuation feeding an appreciation of detachment of human interferences caught by the term ‘subjectivity’ as an umbrella concept.

² Daston, L. Galison, P. 2007. *Objectivity*. New York: Zone Books.

³ Scientific has been bracketed because at that time there was not an understanding of science in the sense understood today.

This is not the main pattern underlying a detached position but it certainly adds to the actual dominant appreciation of objectivity as a quality in the aim of describing the 'real' world.

Aboutness as characteristic of the human condition

The following excerpt is borrowed from a comment on an article composed by Thomas Wynn (2021). It briefly depicts the underlying development and dynamic on which the aforementioned semantic appreciation is becoming imposed.

What is aboutness actually?

(...) aboutness refers to a stance following from a type of practice.

Considering the previous stage in the development in which a perspective such as aboutness did not even occur helps understanding.

Based on studies in ethology and in developmental psychology, non human i.e. not cultural developed - animals are directly engaged in the fluctuations of the conditions at hand. Two dogs fighting for a bone are dynamically and directly linked to one another. Neither of the dogs involved is able to consider "*the other one is having the bone I want*". There is only tense interconnectedness, fully dynamic. So far for the initial shared condition; a clarification which will facilitate the understanding of what aboutness consists of.

It certainly is not some mysterious so called mental ability. It is a particular perspective or rather approach which originated in a relation to an implement onto which adaptations got applied. If the denotation "perspective" might come as to volatile too, it comes down to the selection, organization or ordering of input in function of an act to be executed. Being hungry for instance will organize the visual input and motor grasping onto anything which could serve as food. For some groups of hominin having hands to grasp there is already a condition of readiness in place. Mobilizing the hands in order to get grip on some food in a direct way or on an implement in order to reach food such as an ant dipping tool or a hammer to break the bolster of nuts is not a novelty. Meaning that what in the end will be called "aboutness" does not start from thin air, there are elements already in place. The experience of aboutness is but a stage – maybe the final stage - in a larger development.

Cutting corners in evolution there have been hominin which by walking upright became in the fortunate condition that this skilful use of hands got drawn into further exploration and perfection. It needs to be stressed that they did not have to do so (teleological) but the conditions were such that they in a sense got drawn into it.

In the design imperatives of Acheulian bifaces Gowlett (2006) draws the attention to "forward extension" which is of particular relevance for understanding the coming into being of the stance of aboutness. It says "(...) the provision of leverage through forward extension and the weighting of the distribution so that the butt-mass balances out the extension (...)"

This holds two elements "through forward extension" and "the weighting of..."

The first has to be understood in a particular way because being embedded in Western thinking characterized by – amongst others – an inclination into a teleological perspective, the risk is real that it is taken "*because the actor had to check the adaptations applied he had to extend in the forward*

direction". This implies a prior intention, a planning in order to. That is imposing human characteristics on a hominin which is not human yet.

Taking the condition mentioned earlier in which "aboutness" was completely absent as stepping stone the effect of an applied modification provokes the gesture "to forward extend" in order to control the effect – a situation which is not all that extraordinary. A chimp producing an ant dipping tool does not randomly remove twigs and leafs neither. He too checks the result of his action. The difference with the chimp is that for the latter it seems a practice restricted to that particular situation while for the hominin it seemed to have resulted in a change of perspective, quite gradually and probably spread over an enormous window of time. That is not a just so idea sprouting from imagination; the produced artefacts provide indications into that direction. Take the Acheul type of tool mentioned by Gowlett; it is impossible to accept the occurrence spread over time and space of a standardized type of implement such as the Acheul in the absence of the perspective reaching into some space in front of. It is what Heidegger refers to when mentioning "da stellen" (putting over there) and "die Gegenstände" (that what is in front of the observer).

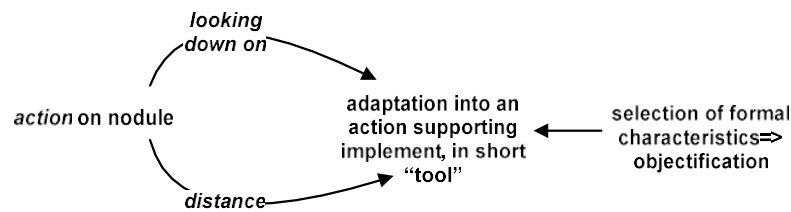
In short, that type of action repeated over many generations probably provoked a shift in perspective. Observe that in this approach the stress is not on the visual component which as torchlight would explore the scene in order to initiate the motor component into action. It is rather the action drawing the visual attention onto certain characteristics.⁴ It is not only shifting the perspective i.e. the position in relation to the implement worked on taken; it is also selecting characteristics relevant for the handling and forging these into a pattern (which eventually will get coined objectification). The core of this approach is that through repeated practice in the long run a reorganisation of the perspective grew, in itself nothing mysterious but a reorganization of the input data.

"The weighting of" is the second element in the quote. Here a similar approach can be applied."Weighting" should not understood as an evaluation from out an intellectual point of view, not to mention a "mental" perspective but should be taken in an intuitive sense. Think of a labourer involved in demolition looking for a new sledgehammer. He will most probably not apply mechanical reasoning but knowledge through manipulation.⁵ Again there is nothing "mental" – whatever that might mean - involved. The evaluation is embedded in motor manipulations, stronger still it is a motor mode evaluation. The labourer does not have to consider, to think discursive in order to decide; he experiences the rightness of wrongness in a direct manner.

Joining both elements into one gesture results in a shift of the perspective onto some point of attention in front of the actor evaluating the result through motor practice. Because the evaluation metaphorical sense is a view from above (considering...) this could be coined the objectification *arc*. Observe that 'in front of' and 'a view from above' introduce a spatial dimension in the understanding while actually nothing spatial changed but the perspective provoking a suggestion of spatiality.

⁴ Michotte, A. 1963. *The Perception of Causality*. Basic Books (p.25). Also Killeen, P.L. 2010. Resituating cognition. *Comparative cognition and behaviour reviews*. Further Barsalou, L. 2005. Continuity of the conceptual system across species. *Trends in Cognitive Science*.

⁵ Qualifications introduced by Goldenberg, mentioned by Wynn.



In this **objectification arc** a motor and perceptual selection gradually took the form of a filter, developed into a stable motor and perceptive configuration. Imagine a bricklayer “seeing” the right amount of mason mortar.

In contemporary language it could be said that in the course of this approach an “object” (by analogy the right amount of mortar) got installed, an object at the same time in a concrete form (the tool at hand or the mortar in the illustration) and as a set of formal characteristics (mass, texture, volume, weight, handedness...). I have called this objectification but most importantly consider that this is not a natural thing and there is neither a mental capacity involved. It is merely a motor and perceptive configuration.⁶ The previous lines should clarify the character of aboutness.

Back to the problem

All this allows answering the problem mentioned in the introductory pages. How can one have the experience looking at the world from a position outside the centre of action while on the basis of embodiment that is impossible? How is this discordant situation at all possible?

The point is that the understanding of a relation characterized by an experience of taking distance is brought forth by a perspective i.e. a particular organisation of input. Peering through a faceted diamond shows a multitude of scenes while there is only one single actually present. The depiction is getting reorganized. Something similar happens in the situation at stake in this discussion. A particular type of action, more specifically mediated manipulation, organizes the perception in a particular way. It evokes a feeling of detachment, here the actor with in front (con-fronting) the centre of the focus in a detached way. The detachment follows from the judging look. It is neither better nor worse than the perspective of non human animals. It is only a different organization from which follow particular consequences in respect to further action.

As already mentioned, Sartre coins this feeling strikingly “cette distance nulle”, the distance which actually isn’t. There is no factual distance.

The biological organism did not change, the eyes allowing sight did not change. Changed was the structure underlying experience bringing forth a different way of appreciating what is going on. It bears more the character of a stance, a way of structuring and not a capacity which would reside somewhere in the organism in the guise of an intransitive instance. Western culture is inclined to infer a function from an implement as in the knife allowing cutting. But the motor dimension being primordial, the object

⁶ Susan Carey (2009) refers to input analyzers. This is not different to what I have called “selective filters”. But whatever she means the way of formulation “input analyzers” provokes the idea that somewhere there exists *something* which rightfully might be called this way. It is somewhat similar to the idea of a consciousness by this provoking the search of the location of it. (Carey, S. 2009. *The Origin of Concepts*. Oxford University Press)

only receives a function from out specific act. A knife not engaged in the act of slicing has no function at all. It is some metal entity lying around.

In the same sense the human only holds the idea of taking the position of an observer on the sideline from a particular act described earlier. The act installs a particular understanding and appreciation. By this the apparent division of independent observer and scene observed is a stance.

On top of that sits the semantic conviction with historical provenance that the human better takes distance from subjective biases.

Concluding, there is the infrastructure allowing bringing forth and processing input into a certain meaningful framework and there is the experience following from it. Both are of a different order altogether as such not allowing rightfully to be presented as discordant. It is like the taste experienced when biting into a fruit. The one follows from the other but both are of very different order.

Postscript

I feel urged to add an extra brief part because the view of being at a distance often provokes the idea of a complementary condition of non-division or an authentic oneness in which that alienating distance would not occur. The latter condition often seems to be dwelling in a sphere of a no longer reachable lost paradise.

Again I will fall back on already existing bundle with the title "On the Human Condition".

A condition considered to be a form of alienation

This experience of distance is often referred to as a radical gap, as a fundamental mode of alienation. Lacan for instance refers to it as the price paid for entering the symbolic order. It leads to an experience of deficiency, a lack, a void. It is about a lack of immediate being, an unconditional given reality (la manqué de l'être, le manque à l'être). There no single signifier able to solve that problem, on the contrary the chain of signifiers installs it again and again. Because language destroys the immediate she at the same time calls a longing to restore the condition which has been lost. It is a never ending process because as soon as language is used the void is getting introduced anew.⁷

With this appears the myth of a lost innocence, the image of the lamb, the ritual gesture restoring innocence after the sin has been committed. Innocence refers to the Latin "in-noscere" meaning not harming. In Lacan's representation the human is harmed by the introduction of language.

It comes to me as an extreme misconception.

Because, it is precisely that condition which opens the characterizing abilities. Without it would not even be possible to refer to a particular species recognized as "the human". There would be a species amongst other species, maybe a technical skilled hominid by this different from the others. But there would not be a radical rupture. It only would represent a more sophisticated mode of animal existence.

Negotiating the environment is the mission of all living creatures.

The following sentences have been italicized because of their importance.

⁷ From "L'angoisse, le seminaire livre X.

*Taking a distance is part of the way the human fulfils the mission of negotiating the Umwelt. It is anything but alienation. It exactly instantiates what it is to be human. It expresses the human condition.*⁸

The idea of alienation is provoked by the concept of dualism. It relates to the two world model present in the writings of Plato. On the one hand there is the world of the true ideas and on the other perceptions in his opinion offering nothing else but a scene of shadows. The problem is not particularly the presentation of two different contents but the fact itself of the introduction of two dimensions, in other words dualism. This follows from the question into the essence which in turn follows from the introduction of the invariable or “that what is” (hoti esti).⁹ The said introduction embodies a fundamental turning point in the history of Western thought, a subject reaching far beyond this discussion.¹⁰ Some clarification might be useful for further understanding. According to Lloyd around the 5th to 4th century BCE there was need for an independent criterion useful in settling discussions. Nature in the sense of “that what is” got chosen.¹¹ Morton in turn attributes the origin of the invariable to the production of surplus in agriculture.¹² But whatever the difference in explanation, both focus on the appearance of the invariable in that period. The introduction of the very idea would in time beg the question into the nature of it. As a matter of fact the whole of the history which would follow is actually nothing else than the mission to find out the nature of things.¹³ In that sense dualism as a heritage from the Greeks became one of the most important patterns organizing and structuring Western thinking. The discrepancy between appearance and truth, between being and appearing, between language and experience are but symptoms of that structuring. One should profoundly be aware of the fact that this is a pattern and a version with historical background. It is a way of ordering and understanding things. Neglecting this fact by accepting the structure mentioned for a natural reality produces its own problems alas still troubling the actual thinking.

There is yet another perspective possible on the idea of alienation. The experience of taking a distance provokes a semantic tension. Similar as “milk” promotes thinking about “cow”, “black” to “white” and not to round or square, the experience of taking a distance provokes the suggestion of a condition in which this is not the case, a natural condition in which distance would be absent, earlier called the myth of the lost innocence. This is however an illusion because there is no real distance taking involved only a particular perspective, a way of looking upon the world. It is precisely that way instantiating the human identity, the human condition. There is no such thing as the natural condition only the animal way but

⁸ For a similar point of view: Heidegger in “Einführung in die Metaphysik” (1953). He stresses that there is no difference between being and appearing, both collapse.

⁹ The sequence the other way around might be easier to understand. The introduction of the invariable is the stepping Stone, followed by the question into the nature or the essence of it. In the endeavour to answer Plato points to a true and a false version (allegory of the cave) by this not only introducing that there is something like a “true” version, but of relevance here the structure of duality.

¹⁰ For an elaboration on this subject reference made to other contributions as “Mind what are we talking about, deconstruction of Suddendorf’s rise of the metamind followed by a history based reconstruction of the concept of the mind”; and “The remarkable character of Western thought”; further “Script, a simple introduction into anthropogenesis” chapter 19 in “The 5th Ape”.

¹¹ Cambridge professor of history of science; reference here to the publication dating from 1991: Methods and problems in Greek science; in particular chapter 19.

¹² Timothy Morton is a professor at the University of Rice in Houston; originally researching romanticism but shifted focus to ecology.

¹³ Recall Whitehead stating that the history of Western culture is but a footnote to Plato (offering one possible answer). Aristotle prefers another version but his texts only came available to the West after 1085 marking the fall of Toledo. In respect to dimension of actuality, the physicist a Noble Prize winner Steven Weinberg in a recent publication (2016) explicitly underscores this goal.

once encultured into the human mode there is no way back, similar to trying to undo the boiled condition of an egg.

Short note on corresponding interests

On closer inspection the relation to the Kantian approach is more than but a source of inspiration, more than a basic principle which taken to its full consequence seems irrefutable.

Kant offers an insight on how the human builds an understanding of the world. Observe however that in this more than one dimension is involved. On the one hand he proposes that the input for which the human body is sensitive is getting organized by the structures of the mind. As mentioned, I prefer speaking of the characteristics of the body, but in the end the core of the idea is the same. The dynamic comes down to the perceived scene being organized by patterns projected. On the other hand there is the character of the said structures. He lists space and time, quantity, quality, relation and modality. While I am fully convinced by the idea of the body, from Kant's point of view 'mind' defining the organization of the phenomenon, I am far less by the structures offered. They seem all too post-Aristotelian, actually Galilean and as such flavoured by the zeitgeist characterizing a historical period. It is clear that Kant admired Newton himself following the footsteps of Galileo. Of course the latter did not introduce space and time but his experimental and mathematical approach granted these structures a geometrical and quantified guise quite different to the Aristotelian perspective stressing potential and dynamic.

In short Kant touches a universal characteristic, the organization of input and a local historical dimension i.e. the Western approach since Galileo.

Of importance for this remark is the universal dimension offering is an insight on how the human species understands the world. In his view the cognizing mind plays the defining role. Successors made different choices. Schopenhauer for instance stressed the impact of the will while Cassirer thought of language as a system of symbols underlying all experience.

The point to be made is that whatever the inquisitiveness is driving the trajectory of my research, the theme at the core is similar: how does the human realizes an understanding of the world and further what is the content of that understanding? This at the same time touches another theme quite akin: what makes the human unique tacitly pointing in the direction of that type of understanding.

In short, we seem all taken by the same type of question and by this fishing in the same pond.

I am however not endorsing the structures of the mind as what is "mind" else than a mysterious concept covering effects not yet understood. In that sense this comes to me as clever waving of hands in thin air. Following the method made clear earlier I ended up with the model in which the configuration consisting of objectification, the object taking a central position in the act of mediated manipulation as mode of negotiating the burdens of the environment. It goes well with Darwin's approach pointing in the direction of the best adaptation which only can prove itself as behaviour in the public domain.

On aboutness and declaration

A) on aboutness

“However, such mechanical reasoning (*referring to thinking involved by modern artisans using tools*) includes ontological categories defined via prototypes and essential qualities (Carey, 2009), expectations concerning how objects interact (force, deformation, etc.), and meta-cognition about tools themselves.¹⁴ All this knowledge constitutes a “folk physics” that guides problem solving. ***It consists of declarative knowledge about how the world works***, rather than procedural engagement with the world. ***Did early hominins rely on equivalent, but non-linguistic, systems of declarative knowledge?*** (stress added)¹⁵

Instead of at once getting drawn into pondering a possible answer, the attention should go to the idea of a “non linguistic systems of declarative knowledge”. The author refers to folk psychology raised by modern artisans in which case the idea of declarative knowledge is justifiable but he also relates it to non linguistic systems, by this neglecting the question if in the absence of language declarative knowledge would be possible at all.

What does “declarative” stand for?

From the point of view of linguistics it refers to making a statement about something by this providing some information. Starting perusing Carey’s book mentioned in the quote I ended up with something very different, a contribution by Ullman (2001:718)¹⁶ explaining that “declarative memory is subserved by regions of the medial temporal lobe (...)”

It becomes clear that the qualification “declarative” has more than one meaning. It does not necessarily refer to the linguistic frame of reference but could also be related to the study of memory (contents). In that sense it refers to meaning – a meaningful content - acquired in a direct way, that is outside of the realm of language. Some event is meaningful to the perceptive organism driven by its primary motivation provoking response but it does not declare i.e. does not add information about the event experienced.¹⁷

“Declarative” used in the quote is however related to mechanical reasoning which is about making declarations or adding information.

This shows that there is need for supplementary clarification on the subject of declaration in particular in relation to aboutness.

¹⁴ Meta-cognition refers to knowing about one’s own thoughts, knowledge about one’s thinking.

¹⁵ This contribution got fired up as a comment on Wynn, T. 2021. Ergonomic clusters and displaced affordances in early lithic technology. *Adaptive Behavior*, Vol. 29(2)181-195/p. 187)

¹⁶ Ullman, T. M. 2001. A neurocognitive perspective on language: the declarative/procedural model. *Nature Reviews/ Neuroscience*. Volume 2, October 2001:717-726.

¹⁷ For an elaboration on the different modes: Gilbert, J.F.R. *On meaning*, chapter 9, Six levels of meaning.

As I see it declaration implies aboutness but the latter does not imply declaration necessarily. In other words “aboutness” in itself is not declarative, moreover has nothing to do with declaration. But how is the declarative quality realized after all?

What is aboutness actually?

Reification easily suggests some instance. But there is nothing existing somewhere which rightfully could be called aboutness. It actually refers to a stance following from a type of practice.

Considering the previous stage in which a perspective such as aboutness did not even occur helps understanding.

Based on studies in ethology and in developmental psychology, non human i.e. not cultural developed - animals are directly engaged in the fluctuations of the conditions at hand. Two dogs fighting for a bone are dynamically and directly linked to one another. Neither of the dogs involved is able to consider “*the other one is having the bone I want*”. There is only tense interconnectedness, fully dynamic.

Aboutness is not some mysterious so called “mental” ability. It is a particular perspective or rather approach which originated in a relation to an implement onto which adaptations got applied. If the denotation “perspective” might come as to volatile too, it comes down to the selection, organization or ordering of input in function of an act to be executed. Being hungry for instance will organize the visual input and motor grasping onto anything which could serve as food. For some groups of hominin having hands to grasp there is already a condition of readiness in place. Mobilizing the hands in order to get grip on some food in a direct way or on an implement in order to reach food such as an ant dipping tool or a hammer to break the bolster of nuts is not new at all. Meaning that “aboutness” does not start from thin air, there are elements already in place.

Cutting corners in evolution there have been hominin which by walking upright became in the fortunate condition that this skilful use of hands got drawn into further exploration and perfection. It needs to be stressed that they did not have to do that (teleological) but the conditions were such that they in a sense as said got drawn into it.

Wynn offers a quite interesting suggestion by referring to the design imperatives listed by Gowlett (2006).¹⁸ In the abstract the latter however states that “exploring design targets bearing in modern mind that we have a limited idea of (...) ancient mind”. This quote is not non-committal as it implies the silent introduction not only of an instance “mind” but more particular of the capacity of a source generating – in this case – planning and intention. A bold statement as the whole idea of a mind is a historic invention. It is an umbrella concept encompassing realizations and experienced effects not (well) understood. Making reference to an ancient or modern mind is somewhat surprising in an article claiming to put the Cartesian mind aside altogether.¹⁹

Apart from this critical remark the second of his design imperatives called “forward extension” is of particular importance for understanding the coming into being of the stance of aboutness. It says “(...)

¹⁸ However I have been approaching this subject in a similar way since the publication of *The Forgotten Transition* in 2018, this reference is new to me and welcomed.

¹⁹ Thomas Wynn cannot be blamed for that but the critical reader has to be vigilant. The concept of “mind” is ingrained in the Western frame of reference and even when explicitly bracketed it always pops up in an unexpected guise.

the provision of leverage through forward extension and the weighting of the distribution so that the butt-mass balances out the extension (...)"

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The first has to be understood in a particular way because being embedded in Western thinking characterized by – amongst others – an inclination into a teleological perspective, the risk is real that it is taken "*because the actor had to check the adaptations applied he had to extend in the forward direction*". This implies a prior intention, a planning in order to. That comes down to imposing human characteristics on a hominin which is not human yet.

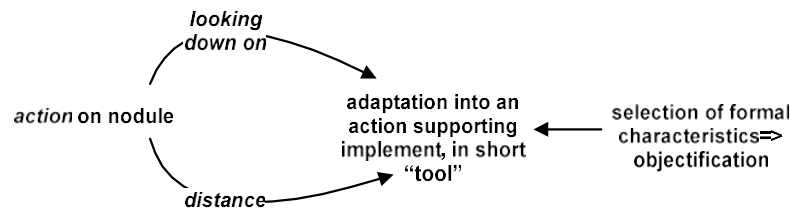
Taking the condition in which "aboutness" was completely absent as stepping stone the effect of an applied modification provokes the gesture "to forward extend" in order to control the effect – a situation which is not all that extraordinary. A chimp producing an ant dipping tool does not ad random remove twigs and leafs neither. He too checks the result of his action. The difference with the chimp is that for the latter it seems a practice restricted to that particular situation while for the hominin it seemed to have resulted in a change of perspective, quite gradually and probably spread over an enormous window of time. That is not a just so idea sprouting from imagination; the produced artefacts provide indications into that direction. Take the Acheul type of tool; it is impossible to accept the occurrence spread over time and space of a standardized type of implement such as the Acheul in the absence of the perspective reaching into some space in front of. It is what Heidegger refers to when mentioning "da stellen" (putting over there) and "die Gegenstände" (that what is in front of the observer).

In short, it is the action applied over many generations probably, which provoked the shift in perspective. Observe that in this approach the stress is not on the visual component which as torchlight explores the scene consecutively driving the motor component into action. It is rather the action drawing the visual attention onto certain characteristics.²⁰ It is not only shifting the perspective i.e. the position in relation to the implement worked on taken; it is also selecting characteristics relevant for the handling and forging these into a pattern (eventually coined objectification). The core of this approach is that through repeated practice in the long run grew a reorganisation of the perspective, nothing mysterious but a reorganization of the input data.

"The weighting of" is the second element in the quote. Here a similar approach can be applied. "Weighting" should not get understood as an evaluation from out an intellectual perspective, not to mention a "mental" perspective, but should be taken in an intuitive sense. Take a labourer involved in demolition looking for a new hammer. He will most probably not apply mechanical reasoning but knowledge through manipulation (Goldenberg, mentioned by Wynn). Again there is nothing "mental" involved. The evaluation is embedded in motor manipulations, stronger still it is a motor mode evaluation. The labourer does not have to consider, to think and to decide, he experiences the rightness of wrongness in a direct manner.

²⁰ Michotte, A. 1963. *The Perception of Causality*. Basic Books (p.25)

Joining both elements into one gesture results in a shift of the perspective onto some point of attention in front of the actor evaluating the result through motor practice. Because the evaluation metaphorical sense is a view from above (considering...) this could be coined the objectification *arc*.



In this **objectification arc** the merging of the motor and perceptual selection gradually took the form of a filter, developed into a stable motor and perceptive configuration. Imagine a bricklayer “seeing” the right amount of mason mortar.

In contemporary language it could be said that in the course of this approach an “object” (the right amount of mortar) got installed, an object at the same time in a concrete form (the tool at hand or the mortar in the illustration) and as a set of formal characteristics (mass, texture, volume, weight, handedness...). I have called this process and its result objectification, but most importantly consider that this is not a natural thing and there is neither a mental capacity involved. It is merely a motor and perceptual configuration.²¹

This should clarify the character of aboutness.

At this point a question and an observation arise.

The question would this condition be sufficient to characterize the human and if not how could this mode which actually is absent in other animals be called? The observation is that so far there is no sign of declaration in the sense of providing information on the object of aboutness yet. As mentioned it is merely a motor and perceptual configuration.

What would complete the condition mentioned in the previous lines, by this providing a transformation into a mode sufficient to deserve to be called typical human?

I will not be neglecting the fact that there is abundant literature on the subject of the uniqueness of the human, but even a short evaluation on the different options would lead to far off this thread.²²

I will limit myself in this text focussing to what I think is the difference making the difference: displacement in space and time or a self initiated extended form of imagination.²³

The extended skilfulness of the hominin mentioned earlier does not provoke that quality. In that sense the level of development might be called that of a **technical skilful hominin** (maybe even ape) in contrast to the level of development of other animals but not a human mode yet. It lacks self initiated extended

²¹ Susan Carey (2009) refers to input analyzers. This is not different to what I have called “selective filters”. But whatever she means the way of formulation “input analyzers” provokes the idea that somewhere there exists *something* which rightfully might be called this way. It is somewhat similar to the idea of a consciousness by this provoking the search of the location of it. (Carey, S. 2009. *The Origin of Concepts*. Oxford University Press)

²² For the interested there is a good overview on this subject by Stoczkowski, W. 2002. *Explaining Human Origins*. Cambridge.

²³ At this point I am in good company with Bickerton.

imagination. It lacks the ability to compose a narrative by this providing declarative information on the object being in the focus of aboutness.

That is indeed referring to what is falling short in order to deserve to be called human: the ability to provide information on the object in the focus of the aboutness, in other words to provide declarative information.

The question quite naturally arises: what is the nature of that type of information and having made that clear: how can it be brought forth? This will be discussed later but let us first explore the trajectory Wynn unfolds.

B) on declaration

Wynn observes that manipulation knowledge relies directly on affordances while (...) declarative representational components of folk theories could not arise without language (reference to Davidson & Noble, 1989; Wageman, 2002). However, so he says, from a less rigid stance one can use the idea of affordance to trace how components of mechanical reasoning (*requiring conscious attention, my addition*) could have emerged out of early stone knapping. (p.188)

This on the one hand deserves applauding while on the other it calls for amazement. Applause because he opts for an exploration on a low level, which is actually the trajectory I would prefer myself.²⁴ But on the other hand he states that mechanical reasoning could not be performed without language but he still wants to adventure how far he could come with affordances i.e. without language. It comes to me like stating that a car needs wheels to move around but let us see how far we can get without wheels. I have however to admit that the degree of amazement is raised on the basis of insights gained from previous research i.e. that declarative knowledge is linguistic in nature.²⁵ (One cannot omit the wheels)

In order not to confuse different types, declarative knowledge adds information to the object in the focus of aboutness. Non human animals not possessing language also have knowledge about a particular prey or weather conditions or whatever occurs being relevant. This type of knowledge is however based on non reflective experience, an experience undergone in contrast to an experience as object of consideration i.e. aboutness.

Recall the goal, using the idea of affordance to trace how components of mechanical reasoning could have emerged out of early stone knapping (p.188)

What does this cover?

Mechanical reasoning requires focussed attention implying *the intention* to focus onto something. The latter part requires autonomy, aboutness and consciousness i.e. make the decision oneself to focus onto a certain item, an act requiring being consciousness. Reasoning itself in turn is about the (re-)ordering of

²⁴ In other contributions I have stressed the importance of action in the in principle public scene.

²⁵ Previous research published in my doctoral thesis on the cognitive dimension of consciousness.

cognitive contents which I prefer to call displacements in space and time. This preference is justified by the fact it directly describes what it is going on.

Leaving aside that thinking of which reasoning is a particular mode, is an anthropomorphic concept – posing a problem in its own right, reasoning requires autonomy i.e. the intention to organize meaningful contents.²⁶ In so far animals may be said to be able to think, then their thinking is initiated heteronomously. In other words when in animal is said to be thinking then the thinking is triggered by some condition, food perceived or a condition of hunger.

The conclusion is clear: bringing forth mechanical reasoning implying that autonomous thinking is involved is no simple task. It requires a particular setup.

The question is if affordances are offering sufficient potential in order to realize (a degree of) that endeavour. In opting for that path the author faces a demanding task.

The text offered by Wynn explains quite clearly the different flavours of affordance. There are no comments here apart of on one detail: the felt reluctance on the subject of displaced affordances. Heidegger offers the case of the pen being ready to hand. The contraption invites to write, seduces into writing. The complementary dynamic is simple, actually ready at hand. Actually corresponding to what Gibson himself expressed.

Buying into suggestions of nested and second-order affordances makes the red light going off, some mental acrobatics is coming in sight. But apart of that detail, the explanation does not require further comment. So let's focus on the conclusion, actually two in number.

The first stresses that mental templates are not to be presumed, the material engagement suffices. Totally agree with that.

The second conclusion holds more debatable statements. Cutting corners, as I understand it the junction of practice and affordances brings forth some ratcheted effect. Existing abilities hook into affordances generating improvement of the said abilities etc. in an up-going spiral. However quite puzzling: chimps also use stone tools and the ratcheted effect seems not to be happening in their trajectory of development. This does of course not say that the author has it wrong. It only points out a so far unexplained not only remarkable but also decisive difference.

The real problem however appears in the following quote “(...)over-determination of handaxe form indicates that hominins not only used handaxes, they thought about handaxes”.

Several remarks come to mind.

In first instance “over-determination” has been mentioned quite abruptly. Also known as Wallace's problem it deserves more attention because it actually puts the finger right on the spot: humans seem to develop more abilities than needed by the changing circumstances.²⁷ In natural selection an adaptation

²⁶ On anthropomorphic concept, the following is quite interesting also in this context. According to Nisbett and Wilson (1977) and Terrace and Metcalf (2005) the human not having a clear insight on causes inclines to attribute the cause to a 5th sense, a mysterious instance (like the mind, my comment). The question then is what might thinking really consist of?

²⁷ This has been discussed in *The supplement to the Forgotten Transition*, chapter 8.

said to be successful satisfies particular circumstances and that is it. But over-determination suggests a dynamic following a logic (or system) separate from natural evolution.

With this we are actually entering the field which is of importance in the goal set (recall: from affordances into mechanical reasoning the latter offering more opportunities than strictly necessary).

Secondly it is not a problem to accept that a continued practice implying repeated association into a cluster of ergonomic features over long time consolidates into a basic tool form. It in a way is on par with the idea of a selection of formal characteristics reorganizing into a particular perceptive cognitive template (objectification) or with Carey's input analyzers. But the conclusion that these hominin thought about handaxes on the basis of what had been offered is of quite a different order.

The mode of thinking by non human animals as being heteronomous has already been pointed out. It becomes triggered by the circumstances of the moment, maybe internal as in being hungry or external fired up by the perception of potential mate. Humans on the other hand are able to self initiate thinking i.e. manipulating and organizing meaningful contents. That is exactly the type of thinking when engaged in mechanical reasoning. Humans confronted with a task he are able to choose engaging in thinking about a strategy to follow, able to suggest more than one solution, even to decide not to think at all about the problem. That is a clear case of over-determination, there is more on offer than strictly needed precisely the possibility baffling Wallace.

The text mentions that the over-determination provides an indication on the occurrence of being able to think about. That observation can not be refuted. But the whole idea was to find out in how far affordances could actually realize this heroic act characterized by over-determination. The text however fails to answer. The goal set is not met.

This could be the end of the critical reading.

It is however difficult to resist adding a few lines on an alternative view.

In first instance the technical skilled hominin has been mentioned. It refers to the development of taking a stance or perspective of distance accompanying adaptations applied and the result being weighted. There is no language involved. It is a change in the organizing of input from pure Gestalt-principles transformed under the pressure of perception modes and motor approach. Paraphrasing Richard Leaky, this hominin does things differently.

This first level of development could have been the end. But it turned out to a) provide the necessary condition for a following stage of development while b) the occurrence of that stage was contingent i.e. it happened but it did not need to. That second stage consisted of the object as the product of the said adaptations starting to function as a second order stimulus and by this provoking a displacement in space and time in the experience. Long story short: precisely this allowed adding information to the object in the focus of aboutness. That type of information is declarative in nature; it adds a declaration to the object in focus.

The thinking about mentioned in the text unfolds on the first level. It reorients and reorganizes the input but it does not add information - declarative in nature - to the object in focus of the aboutness arc. That would require the second evolutionary innovation; the ability to manipulate stimuli of second order by this handling meaningful contents.

The alternative unfolded is based on two premises.

1. The observation that the tools unearthed and attributed to the species which in the end would become called human could not have been brought forth without the combination of a specific organization of input (objectification) and the perspective of taking a distance (aboutness). This does not focus on causes, only presupposes what might be needed for the realization of that particular achievement.
2. It tries to restrict to describing the operations needed to realize the said achievement only falling back on the elements ready at hand and the abilities within reach of the hominin in question.

Two topics

In the first place it should be stressed that the reorganization of input into patterns accommodating the developed mode of dealing with action supporting implements and accompanied by a distance taking shift in the perception is the linchpin. This is the turning point. Without it the organism thrives purely on the dynamics geared up by the primary motivations and the Gestalt principles organizing the input.

Changing ecological conditions probably were the pacesetter for a diverse group of hominin to develop particular abilities or rather skills in the endeavour to survive under the burdens imposed by the environment. This resulted in a hominin technically skilled far beyond other species.

The later phase could not have originated without the first however that did not have to happen, in other words the appearance was contingent. But precisely this finding extended in the experience the factual existence with an imaginative realm by this installing the Umwelt typical for the human.

Archimedes and the palace of mirrors

However this contribution discusses the theme announced, it also offers an insight in the basic frame of reference underlying all other publications.

Introduction

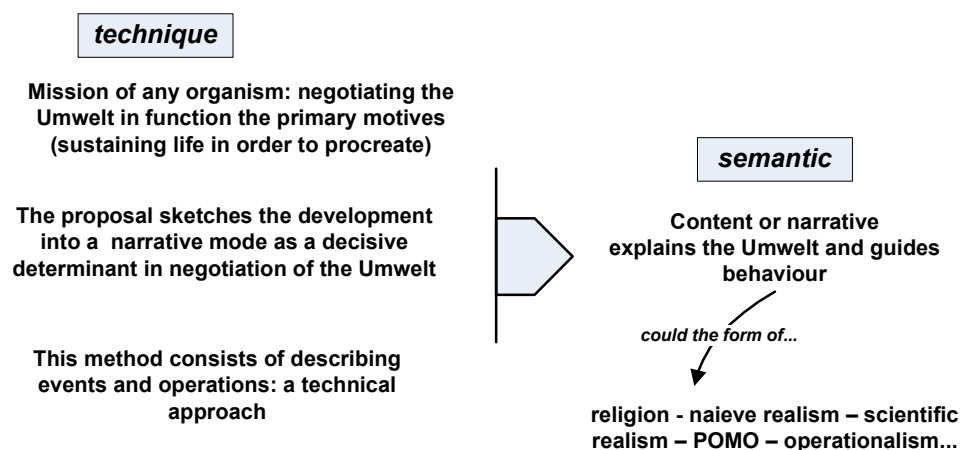
“Storytelling, setting the human apart”, a previous contribution, offered a more formal or sober approach of this subject. It opened an insight in the nature and the origin of narratives, a view on the exclusive and irreversible character of it. In that sense it is more informative. The following text is different in that it will build up an answer to a point of criticism which has to be taken serious.

The problem

Previous research and relentless study of publications from different disciplines relevant for the subject allowed puzzling together a frame of reference and scenario on the realization of the human condition. It consists of two dimensions, the second following from the first.

1. how did a hominin evolve into a storytelling mode in the general context of negotiating the world (technical achievement)
2. the content or semantics of the story produced in function of explanation and of guide to negotiate the Umwelt.

Schematic:



On closer inspection this pattern shows a particular twist.

On the one hand it offers the impression of a report: x, y and z happened providing an exclusive mode, that of narration. The world is getting approached through a narrative explaining what is going on and at the same time offers instructions on how to deal with it. Think of religion or even science: both offer an explaining description from which guidelines how to act can be deduced. Of science is often said that it is neutral and as such does not hold guidelines. But would it not be ridiculous not to infer guidelines for practical life if science at the same time pretends to offer a version corresponding to reality?

The twist however is that this model pretends to offer an objective report while following the parcours sketched out by the scheme, it can not be else than a version - in the same sense as religion also is a version.

That is actually the critique received: is this not a version as any other version suggested? And most importantly, why would this approach be better than the other versions?

Building up an answer

The first question

On this point there is no rebutting answer as what got presented is indeed a narrative, moreover it can not be anything else than a narrative given form by a human being as the centre of narration. From this follows that the position of independent observer on the sideline has to be an illusion in a sense misleading as it pretends to be neutral and thus objective while it offers a narration from a subjective point of view.

So, without hesitation there is no other possibility than to agree with the critic expressed.

Some remarks are in order.

The apparent position cannot take another form than that of a report provided by an observer because it is a particular application of the object focussing arc installing and expressing exactly that form.

This dynamic stance has been explained at large in other contributions.²⁸ In short the application of adaptations to an implement requires the holding in front of and so on a distance. (remember Gowlett's forward extension in the elements of design form). The appreciation of the quality or effectiveness of the adaptations made comes on top of that. It requires a motor based consideration – in metaphorical sense – a view from above, hence the reference of an arc. In short the position of observation cannot be avoided, as the practice of language is an emanation of the act of mediated manipulation, it is a particular application of it.

Secondly the critic does not merely express a question. He tacitly suggests disapproval, which surprises because it is precisely that type of application that constitutes the human condition i.e. negotiating the Umwelt through an understanding offered by narratives. The eventual success or disadvantage of the narrative offered is not of importance in this discussion. Here only the fact that a narrative projects a frame of reference guiding behaviour counts.

²⁸ For an elaboration of "the object focussing arc" reference made to "On the human condition", first essay.

The critic most probably got inspired by the Greek philosophers of nature fostering the concept of the invariable of which the “true” nature became questioned. That background as the flipside of a coin feeds the judgement of objectivity. Without the idea of the possible existence of something “true” the counterpart of something being untrue - in other words illusory - might not even be possible.

Otherwise worded, taking the decisive determination at the same time confinement of embodiment into account, the world we humans experience is a construct from which follows that the idea of an objective reality which moreover can be known is nothing else than a narrative. It is the only world humans have at their disposal.

Concluding that the representation of an independent reporter as presented in the scheme is illusory, but an unavoidable dimension of acquired skill of mediated manipulation of which narration is a derivative mode offering until then not existing opportunities.

That should be the answer onto the first observation.

The second question on a never ending spiral of versions

On closer inspection there is a lot of confusion in all this.

The criticism was that the scheme offered in the introduction was a version. But considered closely the answer formulated in the previous paragraph is also a version and the actual consideration that this is the case is a version too. As it turns out in the end there is but an endless stream of versions.

It is as if the reporting observer finds himself in a palace of mirrors, wherever he looks getting confronted with reflections from which he is unable to escape.

Higher order thoughts

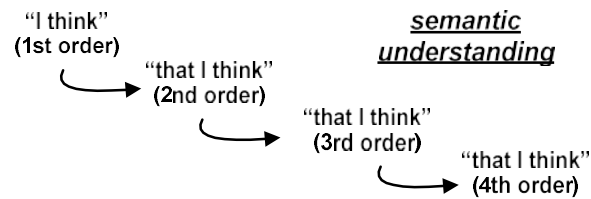
This state of affairs brings an article composed by Rosenthal to mind in which he discusses higher order thoughts.²⁹ Example: “I think” (1st order); “I think *that I think*” (2nd order); “I think *that I think that I think*” (3rd order) etc. What one gets is the impression of an – at least theoretically - endless recursion. In practice people lose track with the 5th order.³⁰ But that is not the point.

There is suggestive misleading in the series of the so called higher order thoughts.

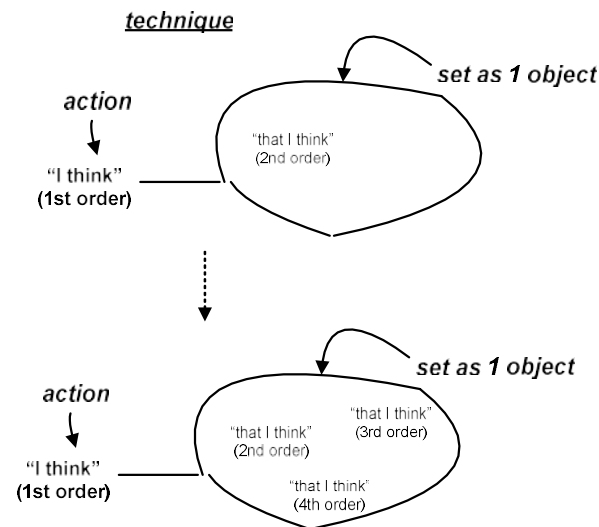
In order to provide a clarification a distinction has to be made between a semantic and the technical point of view. The proposed series suggest the climbing of a ladder by each step upwards looking down onto an increasing number of steps below. This is the way we understand it, the semantic of it. We have the impression that we look down on an increasing number of stages. While on the level of execution, from a technical perspective there is the act of looking back/down on one object turn after turn but each turn with a different content.

²⁹ Rosenthal, David M., 1990, Why are verbally expressed thoughts conscious?, Universität Bielefeld, Zif report nr 32.

³⁰ Maybe an all too wild suggestion: would this have anything to do with Miller's 7 plus or minus 2? [Miller, G. A. \(1956\). "The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information". *Psychological Review*. 63 \(2\): 81–97](#)



We have the idea of looking back on different stages (seemingly multidimensional) while...



...as an actor we only have one object to consider however turn by turn with a different composition.³¹

Think of holding gripping pliers in turn holding a lump of burning coal. In the action one holds only one object but in the understanding a distinction is made between the hands performing the action, the pliers held in turn gripping the coal. In the semantic consideration a complex composition is in play, in the act however only one item.

As a note in the margin, the idea of higher order thoughts is but a metaphor. There is nothing "high" about this. It is plainly an action with a displacement (the thought) in the role of the object.

Translated into our actual problem of a seemingly endless line of versions, there is an actor in play bringing forth one version, be it that the version may suggest a never ending line similar to the understanding (semantics) of higher order thoughts.

The aim of the previous explanation was to draw attention onto the distinction between the semantic level or the understanding and the technical level or the action. But there is more to it.

It mentions a setting which needs to focus on.

³¹ Again Miller's grouping comes to mind but this time in relation to the concept of subitizing which according to Stanislas Dehaene refers to an all at one way of counting; a pre-attentive processing which does not attend to each item.

Blinded by the endless reflections in the palace of mirrors; the mirror itself as the instance providing the reflections seems out of sight.

Again translated into the problem at hand, pondering versions one seems lost in a never ending series of which no escape is possible. But this being blinded hinders to notice that there is an actor bringing forth the different versions. The message is clear. We should not turn and turn by following an endless spiral of versions but shift the focus onto a larger scene: an individual performing an act bringing forth a product, a narrative or version. This redirects the perspective. The burning question becomes: to what end is the product produced? What is the use of it, in this case: what is the use of the version composed?

The criterion used to opt for a particular version

This could be an interesting line of thought to follow because it might be the criterion to answer the problem at stake “why to prefer one version above another”.

The previous paragraphs made clear that there is an actor bringing forth a product, a version in this case, as an aid or a tool in the project of negotiating the Umwelt in order to survive. This begs the question of what version serves this goal better than any other?

Making it concrete, does religion for instance offers a better perspective than the science based versions and, why do I prefer operationalism? Considering science versus religion in case of illness for practical reasons I feel more confident with chemicals thought out by scientists than lighting candles. I will leave further arguments in favour of religion and of science to the defenders of these choices.

Considering operationalism in first instance I am not particularly motivated by realising predictable outcomes but by inquisitiveness how it all works, in particular how the human species realizes what he testifies to be able to accomplish. In a way, getting grasp on the said understanding, if correct and thus successful it would also have to imply repeatability so in the end it is not all that different.

Why operationalism?

It has to do with exactly with the fact that all narratives are but versions. What interests is not so much the provenance of one particular version – however I study that to for other reasons, but how a version irrespective the storyline is at all possible.

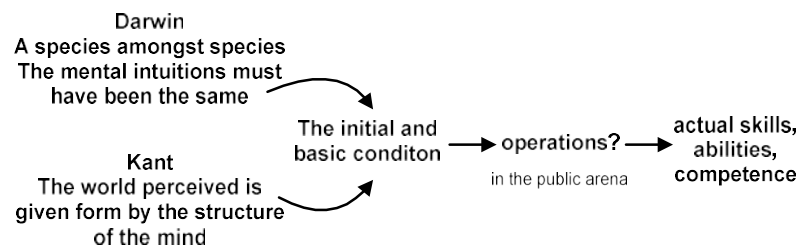
That project is however not popping up out of the blue. It falls back on two principles which come plausible to such a degree that in my opinion they provide the ultimate basis for any understanding of human behaviour, cognition in particular.

Darwin inspires one of the principles. He made convincingly clear that the human species is but a species amongst others. While the attention following from this is in most cases goes onto lines of descent taking phenotype and anatomy as point of reference, Darwin in the Descent of Man commented “that the mental intuitions must have been the same”. It will not provoke objection if “mental intuition” is getting substituted by cognition by this introducing the most plausible idea that human and non human cognition in species most akin must once have been the same. This begs the question how the human could have evolved from that shared condition into the cognitive achievements humans testify of now.

Considering an answer I bracket all kinds of mysterious interventions, even abilities emerging from mutations. I focus on what is happening, what is getting executed in the public arena.

In second instance but equally important Kant's observation is most interesting. He points out that the world perceived is given form by the structures of the mind.³² I would prefer the abilities and confinements of the body instead of the mind, but the idea is the same. And indeed the body determines how the input is selected and organized leaving one impression. It is a complete mystery how some many actually, not denying that fact nevertheless end up with accepting a human ability opening a fully transparent view on what is out there.

In short: humans are animals enabled by the bodies they have, or rather are. The burning question then is in what condition and by what operations are they able to bring forth the achievements they are actually demonstrating.³³



It should be added that operationalism goes very well with instrumentalism. The latter does not aspire to bring forth a true depiction of reality – whatever that means, but hooks into the idea of adaptation in the perspective of survival. It understands behaviour as instrumental to that end.

Summarizing and in answering the question why my preference goes to the versions of operationalism and instrumentalism the following arguments are of central importance:

- the acceptance of a shared initial condition in particular in respect to the aim of survival and use of common cognitive abilities;
- that abilities are opened at the same circumscribed by embodiment;
- degree of effect in negotiating successful the burdens imposed by environmental fluctuations;
- taking distance of all kinds of presumptions and assumptions involving mysterious interventions;
- for methodological reasons (focus on the public arena) bracketing possible effects of mutations.

I like to see that as a kind of minimal semantics; semantics anyway because it takes the form of a narrative but in doing this it restricts to describe operations and the effects following from it.

³² More precisely "(...) a judgement is objective with respect to empirical knowledge *if we add to the concept of a judgement the limitation under which the judgement is made*" (italics added) (Kant, 1929 A27/B43, another reference in a similar sense Kant, B XIII). A similar approach can be found in Newton's General Scholium "We do not know the substances of things. We gather only their properties from the phenomena and from the properties what substance may be... we ought not rashly to assert which cannot be inferred from the phenomena." More recently Nils Bohr states that the conditions of observations have to be included in the definitions of the quantum phenomena.

³³ It would divert to far of to go into it in detail but it should be mentioned that the obsession with brain centrism and information theory is put aside in favour of the importance of ecological determinants, the role of the niche, a view on cognition based on embodiment, being situated and grounded, and the importance of enactivism.

Conclusion

In this contribution I have agreed with the criticism that if all is but a version, the storyline proposed in my writings is too. I have further offered the arguments justifying the version I prefer.

I would like to add that in respect to all narratives being but different versions, that this is precisely constituting the human condition. In absence of the ability to bring forth narratives it would not even be possible to consider a particular species as human. There would be another branch of great apes, maybe a type of particularly skilled ones but apes nevertheless.³⁴

Postscript

There is an intriguing characteristic to the human evolutionary trajectory. The aim of any living organism is to survive and that also goes for the human species. But it has developed a practice with a quasi open character implying a twofold characteristic.³⁵

In first instance the human developed adaptations transcending the minimum need to survive are abundant. This confused Alfred Wallace so much that he in that particular case introduced divine intervention. Secondly, the development may well be motivated by survival but the means developed can go either way: effectively promoting survival complying survival but also destroying the branch on which the species sits and by this itself. This has been discussed in chapter 8 of *The Fifth Ape*, Wallace's problem.

³⁴ For an elaboration on this theme "A condition considered to be a form of alienation", in *The Independent Observer*, an experienced impossibility; an essay in the bundle *On Aboutness*.

³⁵ "Quasi" because it is not open in any thinkable and even not imaginable aspect and dimension. As explained in another contribution, mediated manipulation is at the core of the human specificity. That defines at the same time confines the abilities specifying the human.